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ABSTRACT

This document presents a case history of an 80-hour consulting contract undertaken in 1984 whereby a human resources consultant provided training in team building, communication skills, and creative problem solving to the management team of the Water Revenue Department (WRD) of the government of the District of Columbia. The troubled history of the WRD organization, whose problems included low morale, internal tension, and overwork, is described. The consulting process undertaken is discussed. The first step described involved interviewing of management team members. Management by the whip philosophy, which had been used by WRD, is discussed. Organizations' needs for human resources development are discussed. Shortcuts to excellence taught as part of the consulting process are described. These include relaxation training, training in reflective skills, developing imagination, and identification with the WRD chief. Comments of members of the management group at the end of the consulting process affirmed the great value of investing in the training of employees. A list of 11 symptoms, their effects, remedial techniques, and outcome are included. (Author/ABL)

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SHORTCUTS TO EXCELLENCE:

Techniques to Increase Personal Productivity, Job Satisfaction and Organizational Effectiveness

by

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This is the case history of an 80 hour consulting contract which provided training in team building, communication skills, and creative problem solving to the management team of the Water Revenue Department of the Government of the District of Columbia between November, 1983, and April, 1984. The value of investing in human resource development is documented.

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PSYCHOSYNTHESIS
TRANSPERSONAL PSYCHOLOGY

SHORTCUTS TO EXCELLENCE

TECHNIQUES TO INCREASE PERSONAL PRODUCTIVITY, JOB SATISFACTION AND ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

BACKGROUND

It seemed like a last ditch effort. Nobody really believed the situation could improve, but the Directors of the Water Revenue Department (WRD) in the District of Columbia were willing to give it one last shot.

"We've done miracles around here," said the Director, a Viet Nam veteran with 15 years experience in the Utilities Industry. "When we were hired three years ago to turn this organization around, we were expected to accomplish a tremendous amount in a short period of time and, by god, we did! We hired seven new Branch Chiefs and began to address the consequences of a 20 year malaise. We reduced billing errors by 65%; increased collections by 33% over last year alone. We researched and brought on line a new computer system, and have another one in the wings, ready to install."

"The results we've achieved are praise worthy," added his Deputy, with an MBA from Stanford University, "but the human cost has been staggering. We've been brutal with the Branch Chiefs and they with one another.

"At first, we were able to achieve a high degree of success because of the extreme challenge in front of us--to resolve long standing problems in this organization which have helped to cripple the D.C. Government. We ran on adrenalin, 80 hours or more a week for about two years. Then we hit a wall, like marathon runners. Communications, which were always strained due to the tremendous pressure on us, worsened. Anger, frustration and fatigue replaced commitment and the desire to achieve. We had to deal with a persistently negative press and, on top of it all, the stronger and more capable our group has become, the less support we have had from above."

"What do you need now," I asked?

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"We need to learn how to slow down and see if we can deal with one another as human beings, not as expendable cogs in a heartless machine," the Deputy told me. "We need to come together, acknowledge and get past our difficulties, and celebrate our success. We need to learn something about really working together as a team. We're exhausted, in large measure, because we've been hunkered down in our own little fox holes, solitary heroes, managing our areas of responsibility with tunnel vision. Help us bury the past and learn how to work more effectively together, so that we can confront and deal with the coming changes."

They were burned out, and presented me with the challenge, in an 80 hour consulting contract, to help them resolve three years of stress and tension, relentless demands, internal and external pressure, collective abuse, endless personal sacrifice and continuous self-neglect.

INITIAL INTERVIEWS

I began to interview each of the nine members of the management team, to compile the history of WRD over the last three years. I needed to understand how the departments of Credit and Collection, Account Billing and Investigation, Customer Service, Measurement, Administrative Services, Correspondence, and Automated Data Processing were interconnected. I quickly discovered that there was very little cooperation between the Branch Chiefs; active sabotage was going on between various departments; and morale among the one hundred employees at WRD was at an all time low. The Branch Chiefs were eager to express the human price they had paid for the accomplishment they had achieved. However, while conducting the initial interviews, I kept hearing the same bitter and caustic evaluations of the probable outcome of this consulting contract.

"You're wasting your time here. Management will never improve. Is this a set up? They'll never change! This is the <u>real</u> world, man. What you propose to do sounds too airy-fairy, too touchy-feely, too like an encounter group, too 'west coast'. Nobody cares about us. Our only satisfaction is that we've done one hell-of-a-job. In fact, <u>we're</u> even too tired to care about <u>our</u> subordinates or employees any more."

MANAGEMENT BY WHIP

There are a great many ideas circulating these days about what constitutes good management. Current books on the subject are "In Search of Excellence"; talk about "The One Minute Manager", "Management by Objective", "The Intuitive Manager," Japanese management practice, and so on. A reason for the proliferation of these new ideas is precisely because, all too often, management might be characterized as 'Management by Whip', as it was at WRD when this contract began.

Why is this so? First of all, many people who arrive in management positions have seldom been dealt with in a truly encouraging or supportive way in the course of their own career development. Second, many people arrive in supervisory roles with great expertise in

specific technical areas but have little or no training in 'soft' human sciences that deal with motivation, communication skills, team building, etc. Third, few organizations are willing to make the commitment in dollars and time necessary to truly develop the human resources within their employees. Last, people are, in general, reluctant to do the kind of deep, vulnerable, and sometimes frightening inner work that is required to identify obstacles to success, release pain and tension, develop latent human resources, and make new resources available in their personal or professional lives. Therefore, they perform by whip until it is their turn to wield it. When they become managers or supervisors, they can only do what they have been taught or exposed to, and the attitude becomes, 'I have made it through the system the hard way. I've survived and so can you. Put out or get out!'

Managers are trained to deal almost exclusively with accomplishing the tasks at hand and seldom have the time, training or support to deal with their own personal or professional needs, much less the needs of their subordinates. At WRD, as a result of some notable recent success in achieving organizational goals, there was a small window of opportunity through which to look at the question, 'Is there a better way to run an organization than management by whip?'

In two intense years of education at Stanford, the Deputy informed me, he had never been required to take a single course in how to manage people--in team building, improving communication skills, leadership development, creative problem solving, etc. The educational emphasis was exclusively on analysis, rational evaluative skills and logical systems design. The Director, on the other hand, was disposed to lead with a military style of management. He simply wanted to fire several Branch Chiefs and find new people to fill their slots, when his Deputy suggested they look into a comprehensive training program, and initiate this consulting contract.

HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

Organizations that have lost their effectiveness, spirit or morale need to learn how to ignite the passion and commitment of their employees. Deadlines, demands, quotas, and high expectations are obviously necessary but not sufficient in themselves to evoke ongoing excellence in the workplace. Without an ongoing commitment to the development of human resources, an organization can only survive by short term heroism, as was happening at WRD, then search for new martyrs to plug into impossible situations for yet another short term fix.

As a consultant at WRD, I had to be friend, advisor, trusted guide and ally to a skeptical group of walking wounded men and women. They needed caring, respect and great assistance to begin a rejuvenation process. But it takes more than good will to address the unmet human needs within an organization. What is required is the wide dissemination and broad utilization of inspiring and effective methods for developing human resources. Furthermore, organizations need to learn how to create the kind of sacred space in which people can let go of their fears, defenses, masks, and debilitating patterns; consider and explore the use of tools for professional development; and have occasions to test and try out new talents and abilities.

SHORTCUTS TO EXCELLENCE:
4.

Everyone needs to take off their armor once in a while, drop their swords, step out of the blazing workday sun and take stock of their performance and career path. Training in the use of specific techniques for developing human potential is required to ensure the kind of excellence which results in personal productivity, job satisfaction and organizational effectiveness over the long haul. Let me describe a few of the shortcuts to excellence I employ in my consulting practice, and introduced at WRD.

RELAXATION TRAINING

There is a great need in the workplace for methods that help people manage stress and tension. Good communications cannot occur when one is angry, frustrated or preoccupied, and good decisions cannot be made when one is frantic, overwhelmed or out of control.

Each of the meetings I conducted with the management group began with a ten minute period of training in methods of deep relaxation. At various times I instructed the group to close their eyes, practice deep and slow breathing, listen to quiet music for several minutes to unwind. I taught them how to get in touch with their physical stress and psychological tension and release it. By this they were able to make an important separation from ordinary pressures and concerns, center themselves and become present to the upcoming training session.

It was the habit of most of the members of the management group to get to work early, stay late, never take any time for themselves, not even a lunch break. They were encouraged to take a break, however short, several times a day. Those under the greatest pressure were also encouraged to get up, close the door, and do some stretching exercises for 10 minutes whenever possible. Everyone was encouraged to do regular exercise at home. Research has shown that, when relaxation methods are incorporated at work, a 20% improvement in job performance and satisfaction can result.

REFLECTIVE SKILLS

With too much to do in too little time, the group discovered that most of their decisions were made on the basis of snap judgments. They also acknowledged that, upon reflection, many of those decisions were poor ones, particularly regarding the handling of employee relations. It may take a moment or two to stop, relax, become present, and reflect on the issue at hand but, then again, how much time does it take to dig out of a poorly made decision?

Taking time to reflect, and get it out in writing--hard copy--is another way to increase focus and concentration. Out of the universe of tasks that clamor to be done, one can list and then prioritize them and from this decide what must be done, what can be delegated, and what can be discarded. Reflective writing, like a magnifying glass, focuses scattered thinking and brings it into clear focus.

During this consulting contract, the managers were asked to consider and reflect on four major themes. These themes were the subject of several meetings each:

1. Where are the present difficulties between managers at WRD, and what are the critical organizational issues that must be confronted?

2. Where would we like to be with one another, and where do we need to go as an organization?

3. What prevents us, individually and collectively, from achieving our visions and goals?

4. What specifically can we do as individuals and as a group to get back on track and moving together in the right direction?

Each person had the time to fully own what he or she knew in relation to these important questions, write down the answers, and share them with the group. Focused and respectful dialogue was the significant outcome of this process.

DEVELOPING IMAGINATION

The group was interested in learning methods for creative problem solving because they often found themselves thinking and behaving in patterned and routine ways. The imagination is a psychological function that can help one see a given problem from many different points of view, and can help in the generation of novel, and potentially more effective, solutions.

At WRD, one principal task before the management group was to bring closure to an extremely demanding and difficult three year effort. After evoking an inner image of his own three year experience, a man drew the symbol of a gladiator, naked and blood soaked, with dented shield in one hand and sword hanging loosely in the other. The warrior was on automatic pilot, as it were; ready to do battle again, but with little enthusiasm, strength or spirit. In one expressive symbol, he was able to communicate his internal reality to the rest of the group in a way they could relate to, understand, and appreciate.

At another point, when the group was asked to draw a picture representing that way of operating toward which they would like to evolve as a group, a woman drew the symbol of an Olympic Relay Team. Each person would take pride in his or her performance carrying the baton and, through excellent individual and group effort, they would achieve even greater success (and enjoy it more) than they had to date.

Images and symbols communicate information in a compact and meaningful way, in unusual and creative ways, and in ways that are hard to criticize, discount or reject. They tend to pull people together by virtue of their unique and human quality, greatly enhance interpersonal communications, and illustrate a talk or presentation in dynamic and powerful ways.

IDENTIFICATION

Initially, the Director was seen as a major villain by this group because of his forceful and authoritarian style, and the communication

within the management group was filled with complaints, negativity and resentment as a result. It was only when the Branch Chiefs were asked to identify with him, see the organization through his eyes, and appreciate the demands on him from top down, that they were able to empathize with him, understand the pressures he was really under, and understand where he was coming from. They could identify with his drive to do the job well, and relate to his own unmet need for encouragement and support from on high.

This was a major turning point in the work. The Director took the risk to expose something of his own humanness, confirm the perceptions of the group, and honor the team building process. After this, role playing was used on many occasions to break through hopelessly blocked communications and clarify issues. A real sense of unity began to emerge.

Much good and effective management results from true understanding of, and effective communication with, others--superiors, subordinates, or peers. The ability to identify with others and see through their eyes, if but for a moment, is a valuable skill to develop. With a balance of empathy and clear direction, one can unlock the energies of loyalty and commitment within others. Only with good understanding and effective communication can others be encouraged and motivated to consistently put out their best effort in the realization of organizational goals.

CONCLUSION

It is constructive to consider some of the remarks written by members of the management group at the end of this team building effort. These comments affirm the great value that can come from investing in the training of employees, and help us understand the benefits that accrue from investing in human resource development.

> We talk to each other now with trust and respect. In five minutes we say what it had previously taken hours of meetings to express and discuss and which, more often than not, led nowhere. We work together as a team now, not simply as a group of individuals protecting ourselves first. **E.G.**

> The management staff of WRD has gained some insight into each other through knowing about and sharing some of the successes, failures, and pains which help or hinder effectiveness. The D.C. Government is the ultimate benefactor in improved efficiency and effectiveness. **B.F.**

> The value of the work for me has been in the opportunity to work toward a more human interaction to solve problems. I learned that by opening up to one another we create a better product. **W.L.**

The nature of this work has helped us:

* to work together as one;
* to understand each other's needs and problems;
* to want to help each other solve problems because they effect us all;
* to let us see things as they really are.

I have more peace of mind. I don't get frustrated or upset when something happens or a new pressure is added. I now take more time for myself, and I find that, by doing so, I can complete more work in a much better frame of mind. **E.J.**

WRD benefited by the key players' involvement and participation in realizing the latent forces that can be tapped to accomplish greatness. **J.D.**

AUTHOR

Michael H. Brown, M.A., is a Human Resources Consultant living in Springfield, Virginia. He has been conducting personal growth and professional training programs throughout the United States and Canada since 1974. Mr. Brown has appeared on more than 100 radio and television programs, and is the author of 15 articles, on such topics as enhancing creativity, organization transformation, new methods for developing human resources, and the use of wilderness for personal and professional growth.

Mr. Brown has taught courses at American University, the University of New York at New Paltz, Piedmont Virginia Community College, and other institutions of higher education. As a consultant, he conducts a wide variety of professional training programs such as team building, improving communication skills, assertiveness training, career development, stress management, managerial and supervisory training. A partial list of his clients include: USDA-Forest Service; USDI-Bureau of Land Management; the Government of the District of Columbia; Office of the Secretary of Navy; Office of Personnel Management; the University of Idaho, College of Forestry; and NASA.

TECHNIQUES FOR DEVELOPING HUMAN RESOURCES

	SYMPTOM	EFFECT	REMEDIAL TECHNIQUES	OUTCOME
1)	OVERWHELMED	OUT OF CONTROL, ABSORBED IN WORK	PREPARATION	ROLE DISTANCE, WITNESS POSITION
2)	STRESS TENSION	SOMATIC ILLNESS, ANXIETY, LOW PRODUCTIVITY, FEAR	RELAXATION TRAINING, STRETCHING EXERCISES, BREATHING TECHNIQUES	CALM, CENTERED, PRESENT, ALERT, ENERGIZED
3)	UNFOCUSED, SCATTERED THINKING	LOW JOB SATISFACTION	REFLECTIVE THINKING, MEDITATION, JOURNAL WRITING	FOCUS, CONCENTRATION, MENTAL CLARITY
4)	POOR DECISIONS	MISUNDERSTANDING, ERRORS IN JUDGEMENT, PERSONNEL PROBLEMS	ACTIVE LISTENING, RECEPTIVE THINKING, SYNOPTIC STATEMENTS	INSIGHT, WISDOM
5)	NARROW MINDED	TUNNEL VISION, FIXED ATTITUDES, LOST IN DETAIL	VISUALIZATION, GUIDED IMAGERY	IMAGINATION, INSPIRATION, PERSPECTIVE
6)	FEAR OF COM-MUNICATING	SHY, TIMID, SUSPICIOUS, PLAYING THE VICTIM ROLE	USE OF SYMBOLS, ILLUSTRATIONS & ART	PATTERN RECOGNITION, CREATIVE SELF-EXPRESSION
7)	UNGROUNDED	LOST IN MEANINGLESS ACTIVITY	ANALYTICAL SKILLS	UNDERSTANDING, REASON
8)	TOO RATIONAL	DISTANT, COLD, ALOOF	INNER DIALOGUE	INTUITION
9)	TOO ASSERTIVE TOO MUCH EGO	GENERATES HOSTILITY, RESENTMENT FROM OTHERS	ROLE PLAYING, IDENTIFICATION	EMPATHY
10)	MISSED DEAD-LINES, LOW TEAM MORALE	UNCLEAR VALUES, PRIORITIES, GOALS	STRATEGIC PLANNING	COMMITMENT, MOTIVATION
11)	SELF-DOUBT, LOW SELF-ESTEEM	POOR ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS	PLAN EXECUTION	PERSONAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL EXCELLENCE

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